

Symposium Introduction

SPYROS D. ORFANOS

The musical creations of Mikis Theodorakis have been inspiring and galvanizing audiences for over 50 years. His musical output for concert halls, cinema, theatre, opera, ballet and tavernas has been enormous and sublime. From 1960 to 1967 Theodorakis' project can, in part, be understood as a cultural revolution. He achieved this by wedding music to poetry and inviting every Greek to the wedding festivities. From 1967 to 1974 his project was to unite the resistance against the military dictatorship. From 1975 to the present, Theodorakis has created magnificent melodies and musical forms that are remarkable for their clarity and innovation.

For five decades Mikis Theodorakis has led the fight against cultural and political oppression. He has given the people of Greece access to their greatest poets and he has provided the opportunity for collective mourning and healing. His songs helped the people of Greece heal from the profound conflicts and traumas of World War II, the Civil War that followed, foreign interference, and the military junta of 1967-1974. His music affirms life in the face of despair and death. His music gives realistic hope to the listener.

For these reasons, the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of Queens College decided to sponsor a live musical symposium titled "Celebrating Mikis Theodorakis: 50 years of Musical Creativity." The symposium was part of the festivities and events held for the 25th anniversary of the Center and were held at the Chian House on May 2, 1999. The Center is the only institution of higher learning in North America, and perhaps the world, that offers an academic course titled "Mikis Theodorakis: Music, Culture and the Creative Process."

The celebration was open to the public and 500 people showed

up for the musical performance and the three scholarly presentations. The Director of the Center Harry J. Psomiades welcomed the audience to the symposium. Gail Holst-Warhaft read in Greek and in English a letter from Mikis Theodorakis. Grigoris Maninakis was the artistic director and vocalist for the event. He and his band, Marios Charalambous (bouzouki), Kyriakos Hadjittofis (guitar), Glafkos Kontemeniotis (piano) and Claudia Tseng (flute), performed many of Theodorakis' best-loved songs. Professors Spyros D. Orfanos, Nicos Alexiou, and Gail Holst-Warhaft presented short papers discussing the life history, politics, and music of the composer. The Theodorakis letter and the two papers by Holst-Warhaft and Orfanos that follow may give the reader a feel of the musical celebration held on the second day in May of 1999. We recall, however, Plato's words, "All this is a prelude to the song itself which must be learned."

From Epitafios to Antigone : Theodorakis's Musical Circle

GAIL HOLST-WARHAFT

In the late 1950's, Greek artist and intellectuals, especially but not exclusively those on the left, felt they had a mission. The country was slowly recovering economically from the devastating effects of the war and the Civil War, but the deep political divisions between Right and Left were reinforced by the chasm that existed between intellectuals and the ordinary people of Greece. During the years in which artists had been forced by circumstances to fight shoulder to shoulder with Greek peasants and later share the privations of prison camp with them, some had understood not only that the chasm existed, but that the ordinary Greek people had resources, in particular musical and poetic resources, that they, as bourgeois Greeks, had never suspected. It was on the island of Ikaria, in 1947, that Theodorakis first listened attentively to the *rebetika* songs of the urban working class. He had been born into a middle class household where such music was not encouraged. On Ikaria he realized that not only were many of the *rebetika* songs musically interesting, but they spoke to the very Greeks that he and his fellow artists wished to reach out to. Soon he began notating the melodies of the songs, eager to use them as the raw material of a new sort of popular music, one that would cross boundaries of class and education and appeal to all Greeks.

Theodorakis and his fellow composer Manos Hadzidakis were the leaders of what was to become a most extraordinary experiment in popular music. There are many cultures in which popular